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INFO RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE

RUEHZS/ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS

RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 4948

RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 7758

RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 4779

RUEHOT/AMEMBASSY OTTAWA 7486

RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL 3713

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BANGKOK 005315

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SUBJECT: BANGKOK-BASED AMBASSADORS AGREE ON NEED TO KEEP BURMA CRISIS "ON THE RADAR" WITH THAI GOVERNMENT AND IN ASEAN

REF: A. BANGKOK 5267 (THAI ENERGY IN BURMA)
[B. BANGKOK 5107 \(ENGAGING ASEAN\)](#)

Classified By: Ambassador Ralph L. Boyce, reason 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: Ambassador met with a group of like-minded ambassadors on October 8 to discuss Burma issues. The group agreed that:

-- We should not accept the view that UNSC special envoy Gambari is the "only game in town."

-- Gambari should not wait until mid-November to return to Burma.

-- In addition to calls for the unconditional release of all imprisoned demonstrators, the Burmese junta should be pressed to accept the offers of humanitarian assistance from Red Cross or similar organizations to provide medical treatment to those still imprisoned.

-- Singapore has played a very helpful role within ASEAN so far. However, Singapore may be partly motivated by a desire to deflect criticism of its role as a banking hub for Burma.

-- We share the goal of achieving sustained international attention to this as a continuing crisis. We should avoid rhetoric implying that the crisis is "over" or that the junta "has won."

-- Each individual effort by our governments to affect international opinion may be small, but their cumulative effect will be more significant.

-- We can accept the idea of a spectrum of actions, ranging from the US position on tougher sanctions to less confrontational approaches from countries in the region. We should avoid letting the Burmese play us off against each other in arguments over the advisability of sanctions or other methods. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (C) Ambassador met with a group of like-minded ambassadors on October 8 to review our responses to the situation in Burma (see participants list para 11). The Ambassador recounted a conversation earlier that day with MFA Permsec Virasakdi Futrukul, who quoted the Burmese leaders as saying that they would not accept any interference from anyone except the UN. The ambassadors in our meeting rejected this argument, agreeing that we should not concede that this a matter for the UN only. Ambassador Boyce noted that, given the junta's accusations that the US was behind the protests,

we thought it particularly useful for other countries to raise their concerns publicly, so the GOB cannot fall back on blaming everything on a US conspiracy.

¶3. (C) There was general agreement on the importance of keeping public opinion and diplomatic efforts focused on the problem. "The whole game is to make clear that it's not over and it's not going back to normal," the Danish ambassador said. The EU ambassador also underscored the importance of keeping the issue alive, noting the predilection of the Thai to "push aside uncomfortable issues." There was a consensus to avoid making statements in public that seemed to indicate that the junta "had won" and the opposition movement "was over." (Note: as some of our colleagues have been quoted, perhaps incorrectly, as saying. End note.)

¶4. (C) All agreed that Gambari should return before mid-November. The Finnish ambassador suggested he return within the next 10 days. The UNSC should take steps to "strengthen Gambari's hand;" the proposed presidential statement (PRST) was one way to do this. There was great concern over the plight of detainees, and agreement that, in addition to calling for their unconditional release, the GOB should be pressured to accept assistance from the Red Cross or other organizations that could provide medical treatment to detainees on a humanitarian basis.

ADDITIONAL SANCTIONS

¶5. (C) EU Ambassador Hamburger noted that EU officials would meet in Brussels next week to consider additional sanctions, perhaps including further visa restrictions or other measures

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affecting Burmese companies. Ambassador Boyce described additional US measures already announced. Several ambassadors discussed targeting financial transactions, and wanted to consider ways to go after the leading families, drawing a parallel to the recent actions against the Pinochet family. The EU is also considering restrictions on the gem and timber trade. French Ambassador Bili said that it was not yet decided whether the French foreign minister might travel to the region, including possibly Burma. (The EU ambassadors had a sidebar on whether this French proposal was in keeping with EU practice and policy). He might travel as soon as next week, if he does come.

GOOD GUYS AND BAD GUYS

¶6. (C) All agreed that Singapore had played a very helpful role in pushing ASEAN to take a better public position. However, it was noted that Singapore is a large investor in Burma, and also a banking hub for the junta. (Participants agreed that the description of Singapore as "money-laundering" for the junta was unhelpful, as this made it easy for Singapore to reject the criticism, insisting on the legal nature of its banking transactions.) Singapore may hope to deflect attention from these ties through a vigorous diplomatic effort. Singapore will also seek to avoid having their November summit "hijacked" by the problems in Burma. Thailand also has more economic clout, potentially, than it likes to admit. 40 percent of Rangoon's official revenue comes from energy sales to Thailand (ref A). All agreed, however, that Thailand could not simply stop these purchases as it relied on Burma for energy supplies. The EU ambassador noted that there could be consideration of "burden sharing," in the form of some kind of compensation to ASEAN countries for the economic damages they could suffer if they take concrete steps against the junta.

¶7. (C) All recognized that China had been indispensable in securing agreement for the Gambari visit. The Chinese ambassador had even received Gambari at the airport, we were told. It was noted that the Chinese are concerned about

possible threats to disrupt their Olympic games through boycotts by those opposed to their position on Burma. All agreed that this was not the best tactic at this time, as it was better to work with, not antagonize, China. India had been less helpful, particularly its decision to sign an energy agreement with Burma in the midst of the current crisis.

18. (C) Altogether, it was clear that key countries (ASEAN, China, India) could take more measures to pressure the Burmese. However, Ambassador Boyce noted that, in the past, the GOB had played off one country against another, and we had focused on our different approaches rather than our shared goals. We can accept the idea of a spectrum of actions, with the US and some other countries taking the toughest, pro-sanction position, while others use their connections to Burma to try to influence the junta. EU Ambassador Hamburger said that the EU had proposals on the table for "more of everything:" more sanctions, more contacts, more humanitarian assistance and more multilateral consultations. On Thailand, the group noted Thailand's inconsistent message, which results in part from entrenched unhelpful views at the MFA, especially FM Nitya, and we recognized the need to stay engaged with Thai officials both on broad Burma policy and specific Burma-related problems, such as refugees.

ASEAN - RANGE OF OPTIONS

19. (C) The Ambassador noted that, although governments remained cautious, there was wide-ranging discussion within ASEAN of additional measures to take. While most thought that ASEAN would not expel Burma, there were arguments being made for suspension. Ambassador Boyce also pointed to two mechanisms that have been useful in the region in the past

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One option might be to form a "Friends of Burma" group, along the lines of the "Friends of Cambodia" that worked together in the 1990's. ASEAN might also be encouraged to revive its Troika (consisting of the past, present and future ASEAN Chairs -- in this case, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand) to play a leading role in this matter.

COMMENT

10. (C) Each embassy represented at our meeting has been fully occupied managing its own responses to the Burma crisis; this was the first opportunity to gather a group of like-minded ambassadors to share views. We found a high level of agreement on most questions, particularly on the need for us to help keep the issue on the radar for the Thai public and Thai officials, who tend to "push aside uncomfortable issues," as one ambassador said. Septel will outline a number of recent meetings and press events post has undertaken towards this end. End comment.

PARTICIPANTS

11.(U) The meeting was attended by ambassadors of Finland, Czech Republic, Portugal, EU, Italy, Sweden, Canada, Denmark, France, and Belgium, and by political counselors from Australia and the UK.

BOYCE